

They're Back

Spring has arrived and the “Gators of Arkansas Post” have come out of their winter dens to soak up some rays.

Once prized for its valuable hide, the American Alligator (*Alligator mississippiensis*) was nearly hunted to extinction. Fortunately, alligator populations in Arkansas have increased following twenty years of protection under the Federal Endangered Species Act. The waters of Arkansas Post National Memorial provide valuable habitat to over a dozen alligators, some of which are fourteen feet in length.



What do Alligators eat?

Alligators will eat just about anything that gets close enough. Soon after alligators emerge from their eggs they begin to look for food. Young gators normally eat insects, snails, frogs and small fish. As the gator grows, it adds larger animals to the menu.

An adult alligator's diet typically includes frogs, birds, turtles, snakes, fish and the occasional smaller gator that gets too close. The alligators of Arkansas Post are large enough that they will eat raccoons, nutria, muskrat, and even a deer. Better keep that dog on a leash!

Never feed an alligator! When we feed gators, they associate humans with an easy food source.

Do not get too close! Keep at least 15 feet between you and the alligator. (Gators can run 30 mph. for short distances)



“What big claws you have . . .”

Female alligators normally lay between 25 and 60 eggs in late Spring. An alligator uses its large claws to dig a nest where the eggs will be incubated for 2 - 3 months. While she is waiting for the eggs to hatch, the mother stays near the nest to protect it. Once the eggs hatch, she will continue to protect her young until they become large enough to protect themselves from predators such as birds, raccoons, and large fish.

The American Alligator is often confused with its cousin the American Crocodile. If you look closely, but not too close, you can see that the crocodile's snout is pointed. The alligator has a rounded or “bulbous” snout. Another clue to telling them apart is to look at the tail. A crocodile's tail has pointed ridges that are larger than those of the alligator. There are no crocodiles in Arkansas, although they are making a come-back in Southern Florida.

American Crocodile (*Crocodylus acutus*)



The skin on the alligator's nose is covered with tiny **sensory receptors** which enable the animal to sense vibrations in the water.